Fowl
Feathered
Review
№ 176

Issue № 176: Sea Angels Seen from Many Angles

Fowl Feathered Review is a quarterly, a disordered artifact of the human impulse to categorize and consume the ephemeral. Produced by the Springwound Mammoth Pancake Coalition—an entity distinct from its waffle-centric counterpart—it is birthed under the Fowlpox Press imprint. Virgil Kay, its editor, presides over this enterprise from a paper canoe adrift on the Passagassawakeag, a river of dubious depth and even more dubious inhabitants. Surrounded by featherheads and their aquatic card games, Kay's reign is absolute, his word the final arbiter in the transformation of boastful souls into doormats. Layout and visual conceits are the province of Cookie Granola, while melodrama and histrionics fall under the purview of Childe Harold. Silent Bill, in his characteristically taciturn manner, provides necessary pauses. The review's structural integrity, or lack thereof, is the domain of Unkie Bob, whose talents extend to the mitigation of typographical errors and the prevention of electrical conflagrations. Everett Enótita serves as Kay's indispensable amanuensis, and the Ecum Secum Literary Brain Trust, in a gesture of dubious beneficence, offers nominal financial support. Printed upon the verdant expanse of Bald Porcupine Island, and laced with the enigmatic Kraa, a bioengineered culinary enigma, the Fowl Feathered Review remains a testament to human ingenuity, or perhaps merely a symptom of cultural decline. ISSN: 1929-7238.

"I am an observer of life, a non-participant who takes no sides. I am in the regimented society, but not of it."

--Moondog, The Viking of 6th Avenue

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If this magazine does not meet your expectations,
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Submissions

Fowlpox Press: A Submission Guide for the Determined (or Deluded) To the Aspiring Artist (or Sandwich Enthusiast):

1. **Craft** (or **Culinary Construct**): 2-227 poems, a numerical range that hints at both ambition and a troubling lack of self-editing, may find their way to our digital doorstep (fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com). Alternatively, for the visually inclined, paintings numbered 2-953 (a prolific career, or perhaps a basement overflowing with forgotten canvases?) are welcome. We are also, inexplicably, open to submissions of twelve-inch sandwiches.
2. **The Gatekeeper:** Address your offerings to Virgil Kay, Editor. In posession of remarkably discerning taste, or so he believes, Virgil is a rooster of some renown, a creature of instinct and inexplicable confidence. His title, “China Wok Habitue,” suggests a broader palate than one might expect from a bird, though it’s more likely a testament to the local takeout joint’s generous portions. (**Please note:** Include a bio, a desperate plea for recognition that will likely join the unread masses in the digital purgatory of our slush pile.)
3. **Format:** Poems, those valiant attempts at capturing the human experience in meter and rhyme, should be attached in a Word document or PDF. Paintings, windows into your soul (or a weekend spent with Bob Ross reruns), must be submitted in JPEG, TIFF, or a format our aging technology can comprehend. Jokes, if they exist, should be delivered in MP3 format. We are, alas, not equipped to handle the nuanced art of the live performance. Sandwiches, a curious offering in the realm of artistic expression, require clear plastic wrapping and a small packet of Kewpie Mayonnaise. (**Pro-tip:** The Kewpie packaging is, undeniably, a work of art in its own right, and we encourage you to admire it before consumption.)
4. **The Cycle Continues:** We exist in a perpetual state of acceptance and rejection. A Sisyphean task, some might say. We receive submissions 365 days a year, a testament to the relentless hope, or perhaps blissful ignorance, of aspiring artists. However, with a heavy heart (and a full crop), we must inform you that rejections also occur 365 days a year.
5. **The Sandwiches:** Ah, the sandwiches. These, unlike your artistic endeavors, find a permanent home within our editorial sanctum. Virgil, in his infinite wisdom, has determined that a diet rich in carbohydrates is essential for maintaining his regal demeanor.
6. **Leap Year Follies:** Leap years, those extra days gifted by the whims of the calendar, offer no reprieve. Aspiring poets, it seems, are undeterred by such temporal anomalies. You are, however, cordially invited to "take a flying leap" during these additional 24 hours.

Please proceed with caution. Artistic aspirations are a delicate dance, and the path to publication is littered with the fallen hopes of countless dreamers. But hey, maybe your sandwich is killer. Just remember, Kewpie or bust.

Fowl Feathered Review | Poets & Writers (pw.org)

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."

— Virgil, The Aeneid

~~Muffins~~
~~Bananas~~
~~Sliced green olives~~
~~Sweet relish~~
eggs
Bacon
~~Hot dog~~
~~Soup~~
Acne soap
~~Wheat Bread~~
~~Hot dog rolls~~
~~coffee~~
pop corn
corn chips
cream cheese
can diet pepsi
~~instant potato~~
AA batteries
AAA batteries
D Battery
Saltine crackers
Ritz crackers
~~tan soap~~
~~mayonnaise~~
Ketchup
Butter
~~apples~~
½ + ½ donuts
pink pads
Tissue 3
Toilet paper
Paper Towel
Laundry soap
Spray + Wash
Papin plates

DREAM RIDERS IN THE SKY

By the artist formerly known as Chris Croft-Naugahyden's Tiny Heppler

Dr. Archibald "Archie" Morpheus, a somnologist whose distinction was so singular it was practically divisible by one, navigated the neon-drenched labyrinth of the sleepless city much like a man trying to assemble flat-pack furniture in a tumble dryer. The city hummed, a chorus of forgotten languages, the ghostly flicker of holo-ads hawking self-stirring melancholy, and the distant, mournful cry of what might have been a cyber-seagull or Elias testing his new sonic toothbrush. This urban cacophony was but a pale echo of the chaotic symphony playing within Archie's mind, a mind that often took unscheduled holidays.

Narcolepsy, that fickle jade, that whimsical mistress of the sandman's less reputable cousin, had chosen him as its canvas, granting him the unwelcome gift of sudden, unbidden slumber. He'd be mid-sentence – "My esteemed colleagues, I believe the crux of the matter is... snork... badminton rackets!" – mid-thought, mid-air (a particularly memorable incident involving a trapeze and a faulty understanding of "audience participation") when the world would dissolve into a kaleidoscope of dream-fragments, often smelling vaguely of damp tweed and existential angst. His colleagues, bless their relentlessly conscious hearts, saw it as an occupational hazard, like a fishmonger smelling faintly of haddock. Archie, ever the optimist, saw it as an opportunity to catch up on his correspondence with the Dust Mite King.

One summer evening, the salty tang of Coney Island – a smell that could curdle milk at fifty paces --which is why I always carry a spare carton--mingled with the sweet, synthetic air of the city (currently "Eau de Regretful Artichoke"), Archie found himself strapped into the legendary Cyclone. "A charmingly archaic instrument of vertebrae rearrangement," he murmured, just as his eyelids, heavy as a politician's promises, succumbed to the familiar siren song of sleep. He closed his eyes with a weary sigh, accompanied by a faint "poof" as if a tiny, despairing angel had just given up. The world dissolved into the pre-ride clickety-clack, a ballet of rising tension that reminded him of his tailor discussing payment, then: Whompf! Thwackety-doo! AAAAAARGH-GLEE!

(The last bit was internal, mostly.) A jolt, a scream that sounded suspiciously like a startled walrus, a plunge.

But it wasn't the steel and wood that rattled his senses, which were already on fairly shaky terms with reality. It was a shared experience, like finding someone else has also mistaken salt for sugar in their tea, but on a cosmic scale. Beside him, a woman, equally lost in a narcoleptic reverie, her auburn hair escaping its earthly bonds with élan, echoed his internal screams of glee, possibly with a few ad-libs about the quality of the in-dream upholstery.

The dream: a vertiginous cascade of loops and drops, mirroring the Cyclone's furious, splenetic dance. It was a lumitosa experience – a shared yearning for the exhilaration of the ride, a simultaneous shudder of pure terror usually reserved for unexpected tax audits. The awakening was as abrupt as the plunge, or a custard pie to the noggin. He opened his eyes, heart performing a drum solo that would make Keith Moon blush, to find his fellow dreamer regarding him with a mixture of wonder, confusion, and a distinct suspicion that he might have borrowed her dream-popcorn without asking. Her face, illuminated by the faint bioluminescence of a stall selling glow-in-the-dark existential dread, was a study. "Did you," she began, her voice like wind chimes in a minor key, "by any chance, dream that the ticket inspector was a badger demanding our eternal souls and exact change?"

Archie blinked. "Only if the badger was wearing a rather fetching fez and offering a discount on bulk soul purchases. Archibald Morpheus, at your service, and occasionally, at your dream-badger's."

This epiphany, this shared rollercoaster ride in the grand, slightly sticky theatre of their minds, became the genesis – or possibly the slightly unhinged cousin of genesis – of the "Dream Riders Initiative." Archie, ever the meticulous scientist (when conscious), saw the potential, shimmering like a particularly potent mirage. "Dream telepathy!" he'd exclaim to his toast. "Shared experiences crafted from the very fabric of the subconscious! Amusement parks within the mind! Therapeutic applications! A revolution in how we ignore Mondays!"

He gathered his coterie, a collective of narcoleptic souls and fellow somnologists who were either very brave or hadn't read the fine print. Each was drawn to the project by their own peculiar yearning, like moths to a very experimental, possibly hazardous, flame.

There was Anya, the thrill-seeker, whose eyes reflected the manic energy of the city and whose resting heart rate was rumoured to power a small Eastern European nation. "The Matterhorn in Disney dreams, Archie!" she'd buzz. "But this time, the Abominable Snowman is replaced by my landlord, and I have a giant snowball of overdue rent!" Her laughter, a manic polka that could shatter glass and inhibitions, was infectious.

There was Tomás, the romantic, who, when awake, sketched meticulously, dreaming the first kiss on the historic Cyclone. "Ah, the chiaroscuro of impending smooch!" he'd sigh, "The subtle scent of hotdogs and destiny! If only the seagull hadn't tried to steal my dream-toupee at the crucial moment."

And Elias, the engineer, his mind a meticulous map of gears, sprockets, widgets, and things that went "boing" if you poked them. He dreamt of the ultimate coaster – a machine that could reshape the landscape of dreams, possibly with optional cup holders and superior lumbar support. "The current dream-physics for loop-the-loops is frankly pedestrian," he'd mutter, adjusting his spectacles, which were, of course, self-polishing. "I envision something with at least three more dimensions and considerably less screaming. Or perhaps more, depending on the safety waivers."

Their experiments began in secrecy, tucked away in a converted warehouse on the edge of the city, where the scent of ozone mingled with the metallic tang of discarded arcade games and the faint, lingering aroma of Elias's prototype self-buttering crumpet machine (currently under review for "excessive enthusiasm"). They hooked themselves up to a tangle of wires and sensors that looked like an octopus had tried to knit a jumper after three too many espressos. Their minds became a symphony of electrical impulses, pulsing in time with the bioluminescent city and, occasionally, with the rhythmic clanking of the warehouse's ancient heating system, which Elias insisted was attempting

to communicate the secrets of the universe in Morse code. "It's saying... 'Turn... me... off... it's... June... you... madman...'" Archie translated once, before drifting off.

The first attempts were clumsy, fragmented. Archie found himself briefly inhabiting the mind of a confused pigeon. Anya spent ten minutes as a particularly aggressive tea cosy. Tomás dreamt he was a sentient love poem, struggling with iambic pentameter. Then, as they refined their technique (mostly by Elias hitting things with a specialised spanner he called "The Persuader"), they found themselves weaving through the loops of the Loch Ness Monster at Busch Gardens, the sudden, stomach-relocating descent of Kingda Ka at Six Flags ("Needs more cowbell!" yelled Anya, dreamily), and even racing alongside the phantom ghosts of the Phantom's Revenge at Kennywood Park, who, it turned out, were surprisingly chatty and offered excellent tips on spectral dry-cleaning. The dreams became more vivid, more intense, more... well, more like being awake but with better special effects and fewer unsolicited opinions from relatives.

"By Jove, or possibly by his lesser-known but equally emphatic cousin, Neville!" Archie exclaimed after one particularly successful jaunt through a sentient candyland. "We're actually sharing a consciousness sandwich! With extra pickles of perception!"

With each shared ride, the world around them blurred. The phosphorescent city, with its ads for "Pre-Owned Auras" and "Guilt-Free Guilt," began to bleed into the dreamscapes. Anya's laughter, that infectious polka, echoed in the steel canyons of their collective subconscious, sometimes accompanied by a ghostly accordion. Tomasz would dream of the first kiss on the Cyclone, a kiss so profound it caused the dream-seagulls to burst into spontaneous opera. Elias, however, would then change the ride mid-snog, declaring, "This curvature is structurally unsound for optimal osculation, Tomás! And the emotional resonance is all wrong! Add more longing, less... mustard!"

Slowly, the joy, which had been gambolling about like a tipsy lamb, began to develop a nervous twitch. The shared dreamscapes started to mutate, influenced by the fears and desires that they kept locked away, usually behind a door labelled "Do Not Open, Contains Existential Spiders."

The line between waking and sleeping dissolved like a sugar cube in a glass of chilled vodka, or possibly like Elias's sense of appropriate workplace attire (he'd taken to wearing a colander as a hat, "for improved cranial ventilation"). They found themselves grappling with the darker aspects of their own minds – the monsters that lurked in the shadowy corners of their psyches, which, in Anya's case, included a surprisingly well-dressed horde of sentient tax forms. A shared dream turned into a shared nightmare: the ghost of a childhood trauma (Archie's was a traumatic encounter with a particularly judgmental garden gnome), the crushing weight of unfulfilled desires (Tomás yearned to conduct an orchestra of squirrels), the icy grip of regret (Elias once built a perpetual motion machine that only worked on Tuesdays, and he still kicked himself). The rollercoasters began to twist and morph, taking them through the loops of their own personal hells, now with interactive exhibits and poorly reviewed snack bars.

"Good heavens," Archie mumbled, waking from a dream where the Cyclone's tracks were paved with unanswered emails, "this is less 'amusement park' and more 'psychological audit with excessive G-forces'."

Their mission evolved from a quest for amusement (and perhaps a decent night's sleep, ironically) to a desperate race to maintain control, or at least to remember whose turn it was to buy the dream-donuts. They delved into ancient texts, the cryptic pronouncements of forgotten dream interpreters ("Beware the Jabberwock, my son, and also any dream involving Morris dancing," read one particularly unhelpful scroll), and even, in a moment of brazen desperation that involved a poorly disguised grappling hook and Elias humming the theme to *Mission: Impossible* slightly out of tune, made a midnight raid on a forgotten amusement park. Its rusting steel, a monument to lost laughter and questionable hygiene standards, loomed against the bruised sky. They were a gaggle of clowns, smiles painted on their faces with the rictus grin of sheer panic, their eyes betraying the grief that they carried, and the fact that Anya had accidentally used permanent marker. They were on a tightrope, and someone had replaced it with greased spaghetti.

"Right," said Archie, adjusting his imaginary pith helmet. "Plan B. Does anyone have a Plan B? Elias, any schematics for escaping our own burgeoning insanity?"

"I'm working on a small, portable black hole," Elias offered, "but the containment field is a bit... temperamental. It ate my sandwich yesterday."

They stumbled, metaphorically and occasionally literally (Archie was prone to tripping over his own subconscious), upon a shadowy organization, the "Nachtschatten." This wasn't your average nefarious group; these chaps were serious. They wore tasteful charcoal grey, communicated in hushed, portentous whispers, and probably ironed their socks. Their agenda, however, was less tasteful: to use the Dream Riders' hard-won (and frequently confusing) technology to create the ultimate tool of manipulation: a shared nightmare, a collective prison where everyone dreamt they were perpetually stuck in a lift with only panpipe music for company. A truly monstrous scheme.

"Nachtschatten?" Anya scoffed. "Sounds like a brand of German garden gnome. Are we sure they're not just here to critique our dream-lawn maintenance?"
"Their leader," Tomás whispered, clutching a rapidly wilting dream-rose, "is rumoured to communicate solely through interpretive dance depicting scenes from Kafka."

The final confrontation, the climax of their polyglot voyage into the weird and wonderful, arrived not with a bang, but with a slow waltz of fear, on the tracks of a dream coaster they could no longer control. It was a hideous amalgamation of all their fears: Archie's section was staffed by hyper-critical badgers, Anya's was a never-ending queue for a ride that was perpetually "closed for maintenance," Tomás's played his most embarrassing teenage poetry on a loop, and Elias's was built with materials that flagrantly violated seventeen different engineering codes. Anya was on the brink of a complete mental breakdown, or possibly just really needed a cup of tea. The Nachtschatten's influence, a subtle poison that tasted faintly of despair and marzipan, had turned their shared dreams into a weapon. Their own minds were splintering, their identities fracturing like cheap china in an earthquake. The city's glow became a taunting, neon sneer reflecting their despair.

"Right," Archie declared, his face a mask of weary resolve that looked suspiciously like he'd slept on it funny. "This has gone far enough. They've messed with our dreams, our

psyches, and most unforgivably, Elias's meticulous coaster designs! This calls for... ingenuity!"

With their sanity teetering on the precipice, like a drunken tightrope walker juggling eels, the Dream Riders rallied. They relied on the shared experience, the bonds forged in the crucible of shared dreams and the mutual agreement that dream-popcorn should not taste of Tuesdays. Archie, the sleepwalker who was, ironically, now wide awake with purpose, devised a plan so cunning you could brush your teeth with it.

Anya, using her raw emotional intensity as a weapon, unleashed a spectral barrage of pure, unadulterated annoyance – the psychic equivalent of finding someone has used the last of the milk and put the empty carton back in the fridge. Tomás, the romantic, conjured the hope of connection, manifesting a thousand tiny, bioluminescent puppies playing harmonicas, which, while not strategically sound, was undeniably heart-warming and terribly distracting. And Elias, the engineer, his eyes glinting with the thrill of applied absurdity, began reimagining the fabric of their collective dream, turning the nightmare coaster into a giant, fluffy kitten that purred instead of plunged.

Their final ride was a slow-motion ballet of defiance. The coaster, now kitten-shaped and surprisingly comfortable, plunged into the abyss, which had been redecorated by Tomás with fairy lights and optimistic slogans. The language of the battle was a glorious, chaotic mix: Anya shouting encouragement in Russian ("Davai, my little dream-ferrets!"), Tomás offering existential comfort in Polish ("Czy jest sens w tej całej kolejce górskiej? Probably not, but the view is nice!"), Elias muttering about stress tolerances in Portuguese ("Este gatinho precisa de mais contrafortes!"), and Archie interjecting with philosophical musings in Greek ("Το ονείρων εστίν η σκιά της πραγματικότητας, or is it the other way around? Pass the dream-biscuits!"). It was a scream of fractured identities battling a shared nightmare, armed with wit, whimsy, and a surprising amount of well-aimed dream-custard.

The Nachtschatten, who were not prepared for weaponized kittens or existential harmonica puppies, found their carefully constructed nightmare unraveling like a cheap suit in a hurricane. Their leader attempted a final, terrifying interpretive dance of

ultimate despair, but slipped on a patch of dream-custard and landed in a heap, looking less like a shadowy mastermind and more like someone who'd had a mishap at a children's birthday party.

In the end, the Nachtschatten fell – not through brute force, but through the power of a shared human experience, a collective act of will, and the undeniable fact that it's very hard to maintain an aura of sinister menace when you're covered in imaginary fluff. The coaster slowed, then stopped, purring contentedly. The city sighed, a sound like a million duvets settling.

The bioluminescence began to dim, casting the survivors into a fading, slightly sticky light.

Closing Allegorical Montage (with optional interpretive dance):
Anya, her face etched with both sorrow and relief, slowly swayed, a hesitant pas de basque against the backdrop of a fading cityscape. She occasionally tripped over an invisible ottoman, muttering, "Still needs work, that dream-decor."

Tomás's mask was expressionless, a mime's painted grin that failed to reach his eyes, which were currently contemplating the profound sadness of a single, lost sock. He hummed a jaunty tune about the inherent tragedy of it all.

Elias patted the fluffy dream-coaster. "Remarkable structural integrity for a feline construct," he mused, then pulled a tiny, still-functioning teacup ride from his pocket. "Prototype for next time. Less existential dread, more tiny spinning hats."

The city, once a riot of lumitosa color and questionable advertising slogans, was now a tapestry of grays, like a black and white film noir that had misplaced its femme fatale. Faint glimmers of light danced like distant memories, or perhaps just Archie forgetting to turn off his experimental glow-in-the-dark socks. The music had ceased, replaced by the faint, almost imperceptible sound of someone, somewhere, attempting to tune a banjo with a fish.

A single word echoed into the silence, whispered by the wind, or possibly by Archie, who had just nodded off again: "Zauvek..."
Followed by a tiny, apologetic "...achoo!" from Elias, who'd just stubbed his toe on a stray dream.

Bird's Eye Ekphrastic:
A Nocturne in Lumitosa

By Jean Paul Mitchell

I.

Her skin,

a nocturne,

polished shadow.

The young woman, her skin a nocturne of polished shadow, cradles an eye. Not merely an eye, but the Orb, a vitreous moon in her palms, its iris a tourmaline vortex churning with an inner effulgence that hummed just beyond the threshold of hearing. Around her, a looking-sphere of mercury sheen warped her visage into Escherian echoes, a dizzying zerkalo reflecting reflections, a visual palindrome that whispered of Eco's labyrinths.

II.

This air,

phantom scent,

Baltic amber.

This air, thick with the phantom scent of pachouli and damp earth, could not be localized on any terrestrial map. It breathed of forgotten callejones and the hushed interiors of Baltic amber. She glided, a polka of uncertainty, each step a hesitant pas de basque in the phosphorescent gloom. Her gaze, a still pond reflecting a bruised

twilight, held the weight of a thousand untold povesti. What did her occhi truly register in this Lumitosa, this city that pulsed with a subterranean saudadebrilho?

III.

Silence hums,

clown's held pause,

melancholic absurd.

The very silence hummed with an unheard melody; a syncopated breathlessness akin to a clown's held pause before a gesture of profound, melancholic absurdity. Her fingers, long and tapered like the branches of a wintering lipa, traced the smooth curve of the Orb. A tear, a льоза, escaped her lash, descending in glacial slow-motion, each crystalline facet catching the city's ethereal gleam, a moment stretched into an eternity of tesknos.

IV.

Zerkalo gleams,

fantasmaszale,

linguistic shade.

The looking-sphere shimmered, a captive bubble reflecting not just her face, but fleeting images: a dancer’s outstretched hand frozen mid-arabesque, a mask of painted sorrow tilted at a disconsolate angle, the rippling surface of a canal where bioluminescent flora pulsed with a soft, internal fire. These were not mere reflections, but fantasmaszale, echoes of half-remembered dreams, linguistic phantoms clinging to the edges of perception.
V.

Lips part,

silent dor,

forgotten tongue.

Her lips parted, not in speech, but in a silent articulation of longing, a dor that transcended language. Perhaps she whispered a forgotten Lithuanian incantation, a Greek lament for a lost nostos, or a Cuban guajira of yearning. The Orb, heavy with unspoken narratives, seemed to pulse in response.

VI.

Shadowed drift,

mime's unease,

spectral ballet.

The air thrummed with unseen movement. Figures, cloaked in shadows that mimicked the slow unfurling of seaweed, drifted through the phosphorescent alleys. Their gestures were exaggerated, mime-like articulations of existential unease. One extended a hand, fingers splayed in a gesture of supplication or perhaps bewilderment, a frozen frame in a silent, spectral ballet.

VII.

Head arcs slow,

tango of doubt,

knowing gaze.

The woman's head arced, a slow tango of suspicion, neck extended like a questioning crane in a butoh performance. Her eyes, those luminous pools, seemed to absorb the city's glow, to distill its essence into a single, potent knowing.

VIII.

No plot binds,

tapestry woven,

phantom taste.

This was not a narrative bound by the rigid scaffolding of plot. Instead, it was a constellation of sensations, a tapestry woven from fragmented perceptions and the lingering echoes of forgotten tongues. It was the taste of a phantom pierogi, the scent of rain on sun-baked adobes, the feel of Baltic wind against bare skin – all coalescing in this single, resonant image.

IX.

Orb aloft,

Lumitosa's heart,

dream begins.

The Orb, held aloft, became a microcosm of Lumitosa itself, a swirling vortex of bioluminescent longing. The woman, its keeper, its silent interpreter, remained an enigma, her gaze fixed on a point beyond the frame, a point where the boundaries of perception dissolved and the dream began.

X. Allegorical Montage

Tear descends,

porcelain sorrow,

city fades.

A single bioluminescent tear tracing a path down a porcelain mask.

Bare feet lift,

shimmering canal,

mid-leap held.

A dancer’s feet, bare and luminous, suspended in mid-leap above a shimmering canal.

Zerkalo stills,

faintest glimmer,

receding dream.

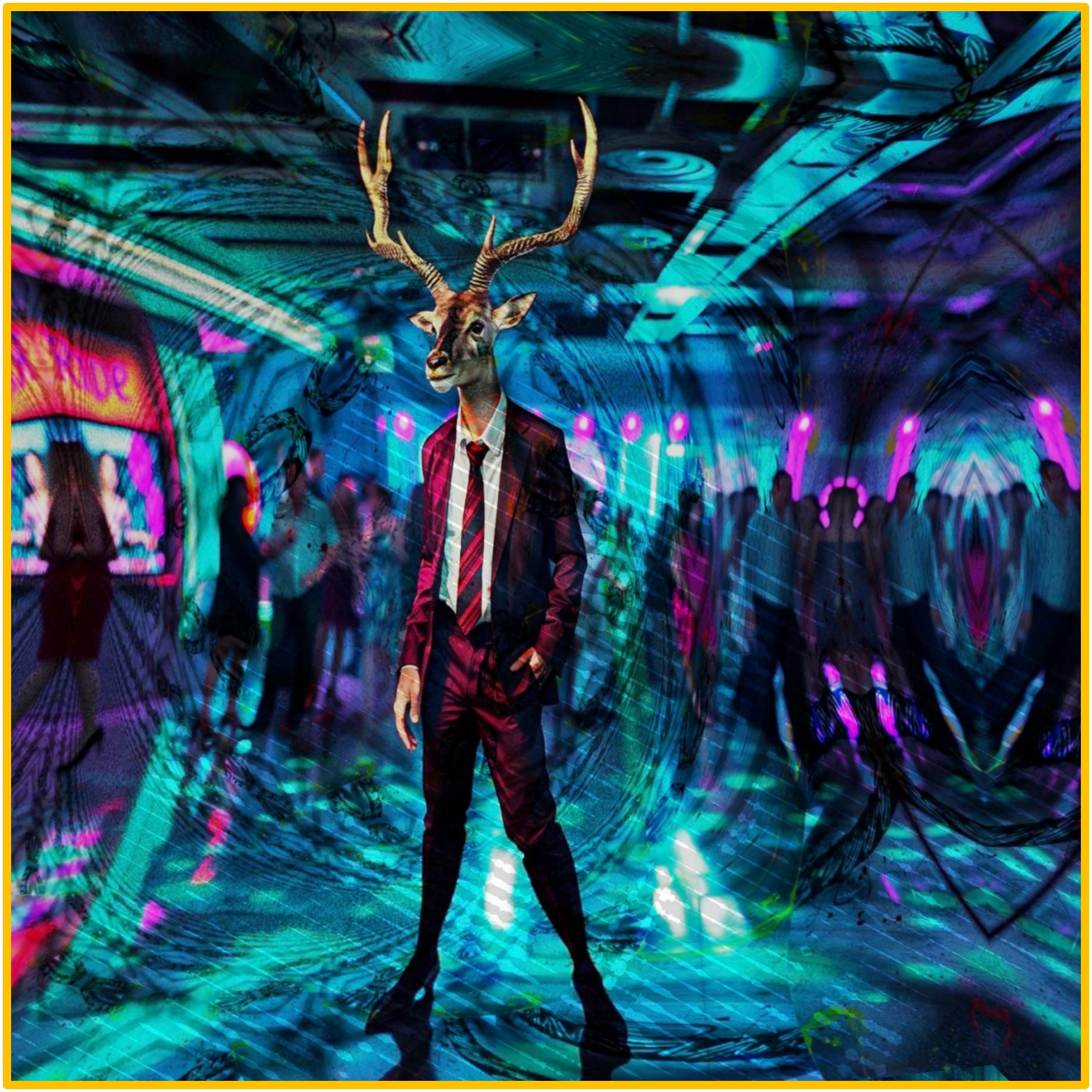
The looking-sphere, now still, reflecting only the faintest glimmer of the receding city.

"помниш..."

"saudade..."

silence falls.

A whisper, carried on a nonexistent breeze: "помниш... saudade..." fading into the profound silence.



Flummoxed Floyd
in Steam-Pressed Flannel

By Hyde Jude Alleway

Antelope real estate agent on the Miami dance floor,
throw me the Mentos from your pants pocket,
or perhaps a small,
tastefully appointed maisonette with parsnip accents?
Your suit, a crimson tide, quite the "Yes Indeed" in the neon sea,
a tie askew, a veritable "Worcester Sauce" of late nights,
and deals closed under a disco ball's low-grade metaphysical crisis.

The Mentos, chap, the Mentos!

Have you made it in the shade with the house flip trade?
Amortized and strategized your Floridian hoard?
Danced until your hooves smashed their way to China?
Watched the dance lights dim as the sun rises?
Averted through greed a needless existential crisis?
Antelope baby you're a dreaded clothes horse
Chomping at the bitcoin unbridled.

ClownCrisisTV™: When the Laughter Stops - A Glimpse Behind the Big Top

By Hans Freilang

In the motorized din of 24-hour gas marts and the rhythmic tumble of laundromat dryers across the globe, an unlikely form of entertainment has quietly taken root: ClownCrisisTV™. This free, ad-supported over-the-top (OTT) streaming service offers a deeply peculiar and strangely compelling catalog of standard definition videos from the early 2000s. The focus? Raw, unfiltered glimpses into the often-unseen moments of professional clowns grappling with the pressures of their painted smiles.

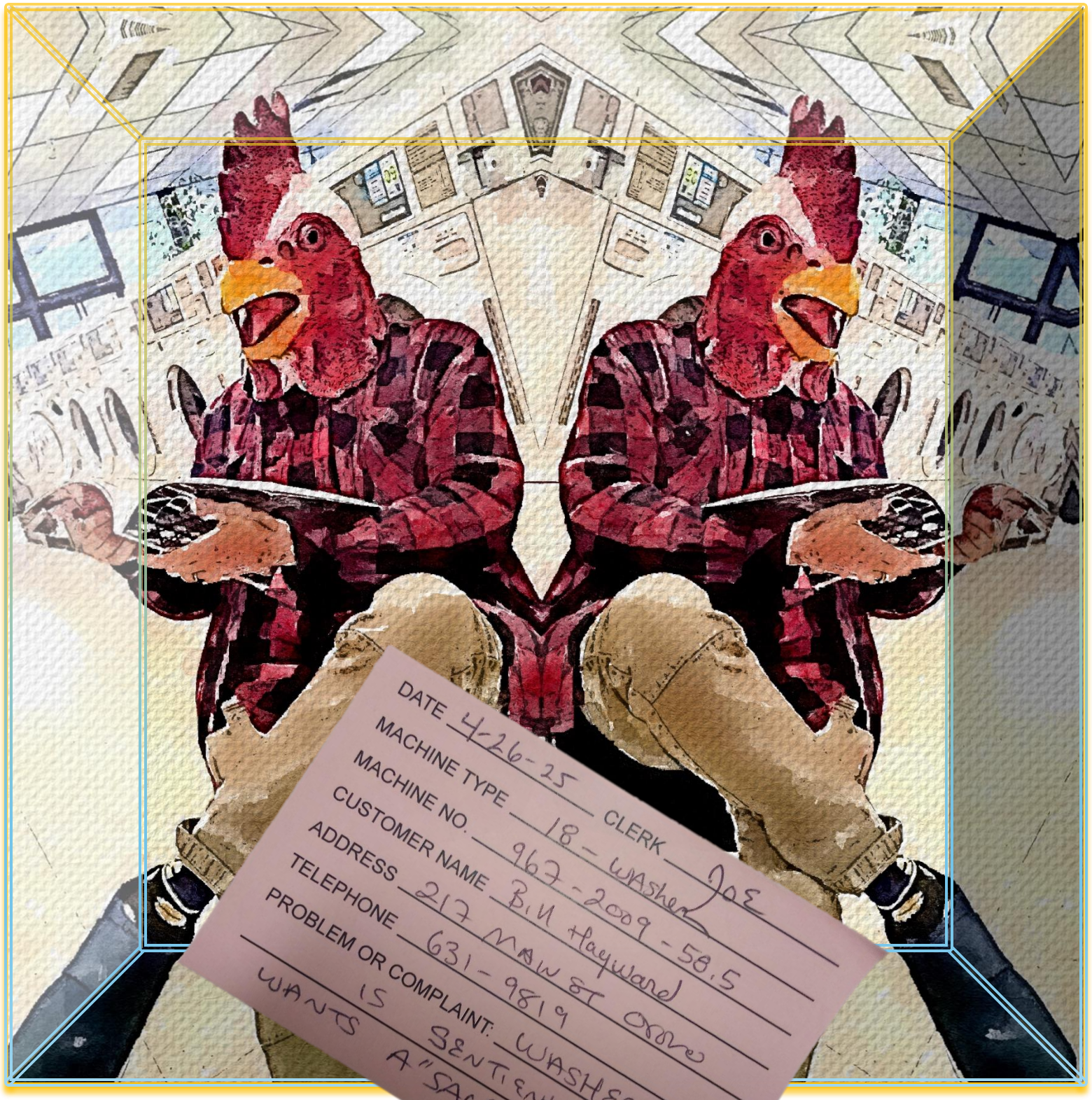
The genesis of this unique archive lies with one unassuming individual: a now-retired itinerant named Clyde Erskine, a man with an insatiable curiosity and a trusty camcorder. For years, Erskine crisscrossed continents, from the bustling stages of Mexico City to the grand venues of Prague, and even the heartland circuses nestled between Omaha and beyond. With an almost anthropological zeal, Erskine documented the backstage realities of clown alley.

His lens captured moments the public rarely, if ever, witnessed. We see Alistair "Buttons" Bingley of the "Circo Hermanos Suarez" in Mexico City, his vibrant makeup streaked with tears as he struggles to inflate a stubborn gag balloon. There's Jean-Luc "Patches" Dubois, a veteran of the "Théâtre de l'Atelier" in Paris, pacing frantically while muttering about the existential dread of pie-throwing. And who could forget Carol "Smiles" Kowalski from "Omaha's Own Big Top Bonanza," caught in a quiet moment of despair over a lost red nose, the very symbol of her joyful profession.

Over three thousand hours of these intimate, often uncomfortable, yet undeniably human moments were painstakingly recorded by Clyde Erskine. He then meticulously compiled the "best" – or perhaps the most revealing – onto a vast collection of VHS tapes. These tapes, initially intended for his own peculiar fascination, somehow found their way into the digital ether, birthing ClownCrisisTV™.

The platform's current viewership is as unexpected as its content. Why would 24-hour gas marts and laundromats choose to feature these glimpses into clown vulnerability? Some speculate it's the sheer oddity, a captivating distraction from the mundane tasks at hand. Others suggest a deeper, perhaps subconscious connection – the raw display of human emotion, stripped bare of pretense, resonating even in the most utilitarian of environments. Imagine waiting for your spin cycle to finish while witnessing the silent struggle of a clown grappling with the weight of their comedic persona.

ClownCrisisTV™ offers no polished narratives or neatly packaged entertainment. It's a voyeuristic peek behind the curtain, a reminder that even those whose job it is to bring laughter to others experience the full spectrum of human emotion. While the humor might be unintentional and the tone often melancholic, ClownCrisisTV™ has carved out a unique and undeniably strange niche in the crowded streaming landscape, proving that even the most unexpected content can find an audience in the most unexpected places. The next time you're filling up your gas tank at 3 AM, take a glance at the flickering screen – you might just catch Alistair "Buttons" Bingley's battle with that unruly balloon, all thanks to the tireless documentation of Clyde Erskine.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Cubist Makeover (Within and Without)

By Kenneth "Ken" Blackmore

Picasso the alpaca. Eyes? Forget about it. One's orbiting Alpha Centauri, the other's busy dodging tequila shots in Tijuana, and his mouth? Last I checked, it was three doors down from the Velvet Underground, which is, of course, the only acceptable location for any alpaca's mandible in this, or any other, dimension. Genetic modification? Oh, honey, that's *so* last Tuesday. This ain't no mere genetic fiddling; this is the Frankensteinian symphony of Chiac-speak and Rappie pie ingestion, courtesy of the experimental arm of New Brunswick's own Ministry of the Absurd.

The "specialized feeding apparatus," naturally, was a repurposed pneumatic tube system sourced from a defunct Krispy Kreme factory (the original glazed-doughnut interface, in theory, was designed to catapult those sugary bombs directly into the gaping maws of obese toddlers in some suburban hellscape, now repurposed for the culinary enrichment of our hero). Finely puréed Rappie pie, delivered with the precision of a Swiss watch (and the consistency of baby food, let's be real), was the cornerstone of Picasso's dietary regime, governed by protocols so byzantine they'd make Kafka weep into his lukewarm Pilsner.

The "Automated Chiac Phrase Recognition System?" That was where things got *really* interesting. It was a glorified Speak & Spell with a penchant for triggering bite-sized portions of Rappie pie, each perfectly sculpted into the shape of a tiny, edible fleur-de-lis. "Bonjour, mon amour!" triggered a mini-Rappie pie; "Tabarnak!" unleashed a torrent of (delicious) potato-based fury. Brilliant, really, especially after a long night at the after hours.

Bio-engineered Rappie pie ingredients? Imagine acres upon acres of genetically-modified potato vines, their leaves shimmering with a bioluminescent glow, their tubers whispering sweet nothings in Algonquin. And a "Chiac-to-Nutrient Conversion" supplement? Don't even *ask*. Suffice it to say, it involved enzymes extracted from the

iridescent secretions of glow-in-the-dark earthworms raised on a diet of artisanal sourdough bread and the collected tears of heartbroken performance artists.

One crisp morning, under the guise of a "routine off-site linguistic analysis" (the kind of euphemism only a government bureaucrat could dream up), Picasso was bundled into a livestock trailer that made a Hummer H2 look like a shoebox. The back doors swung open, revealing the shimmering, sun-baked asphalt of the I-10, a highway that promised nothing but heartbreak and bad decisions. He hoofed it, his Chiac phrases echoing against the rumble of eighteen-wheelers hauling contraband poodles (the current scene). He hitched a ride with a touring bagpipe band. They were surprisingly zen about the situation – a bunch of dudes in kilts, blasting out "Scotland the Brave" whilst passing around a lukewarm bottle of Irn Bru. Their attempts to teach Picasso the bagpipes? Let's just say, the noise was enough to make the devil himself request noise-canceling headphones.

Weeks later, coated in a fine layer of desert dust and the scent of existential angst, Picasso found himself outside a dance studio on the Sunset Strip. A flyer, tattered and slightly greasy, clutched in his teeth, screamed: "Dancers Needed! Gwen Stefani Concert Auditions!" Inside, the air crackled with the electricity of pure, unadulterated ambition, the thumping bass of house music, and the faint, sweet smell of desperation. He bleated a hopeful "Bonjour, mes beautés!" in his best Chiac, a phrase that, miraculously, was recognized by a few of the dancers. Turns out, there was a dance documentary in some Berlin warehouse rave circuit that Picasso had become an underground icon of. He wasn't exactly built for pirouettes (that, let's be honest, would've been awkward, and the hooves would've caused issues), but his sheer enthusiasm and unique vocalizations during his freestyle (a hybrid of Mongolian throat singing and polka) secured him a spot as the "vocal texture consultant" – mostly it involved standing in the corner and bleating random phrases.

It was at a kombucha bar (a surprisingly popular haunt for avant-garde alpacas, along with a handful of ex-Milli Vanilli backing dancers and a guy that makes hats out of vintage drum skins) that he met Genevieve, a "wine girl" with a cascade of auburn hair styled to emulate a vineyard in full harvest, and a vocabulary that was, according to her,

"more expansive than the Loire Valley." Their conversations, a swirling vortex of Picasso's Chiac and Genevieve's rhapsodies on terroir, blossomed over plates of artisan cheese (aged in a salt cave located near the beach, naturally) and a shared passion for vintage polka (apparently, it was the next big thing at the rave scene in the early 90s) and an exclusive club called *Le Cave*...

Inspired by their shared heritage (Picasso's Acadian roots, Genevieve's brief but intense fascination with Evangeline that she picked up as a college student), they decided to open "Le Petit Homard Hollywood," an Acadian takeout joint specializing in gourmet poutine and, of course, Rappie pie (Picasso had, after several weeks, finally perfected a palatable alpaca-friendly recipe, a true masterpiece). The restaurant became the hottest ticket in town, attracting homesick Maritimers, bored trust-fund kids seeking authentic experiences, and a few A-list celebrities who, ironically, spent their nights in the most obscure of venues.

Their family grew in unexpected ways. Their firstborn, a fluffy creature with an uncanny ability to perfectly pronounce obscure French wines, they named Beaujolais, or Beaj, as he preferred it. The twins, however, were... *otherworldly*. One, a small, purple, grape-like entity that fermented at random intervals (and possessed a predilection for acid rock), they affectionately called Merlot. The other, a sentient potato with a tap-dancing fetish and a severe superiority complex, answered only to the name Patate, and had a wardrobe that put some drag queens to shame. Life in Hollywood was like a rave in a kaleidoscope.

One Tuesday, Gwen Stefani simply vanished. Her tour bus was found abandoned on the Pacific Coast Highway, her platinum blonde hairpiece perched precariously on the dashboard. The music world mourned (or, in some cases, quietly celebrated), conspiracy theories abounded (involving alien abductions, covert government operations, and a secret society of sentient avocados), but Gwen had simply had enough of the spotlight. Seeking anonymity and a life of quiet dignity, she dyed her hair brown, adopted the name "Brenda," and secured a position as a quality control assistant at a large-scale egg factory in Fresno, meticulously inspecting each shell for imperfections. She would go on to become a world renowned expert on avian eggshell structural integrity, a career that

required the meticulous details of the perfect shells and the anonymity of the industry. She found a quiet satisfaction in the predictable rhythm of the conveyor belt, a silent hum of the machines that was the perfect sound to match the lack of the music business in her ears.

VERMICULAR CHRONOLOGIES A Metamodern Oscillation in Charlottetown, 1994

By Sarge Eli Corey

The overhead projector hummed, casting geometric certainties onto the hanging white paper backdrop. Professor Jesse MacGregor stood with one foot on the short Grecian column, adjusting his tweed vest with precision. Outside, Charlottetown winter pressed against studio windows while thirty fold-up chairs creaked beneath photography students who stared with calculated indifference.

"The Atlantic seascape," Professor MacGregor announced, "represents our cultural memory as simultaneously nostalgic artifact and constructed fiction."

KABLAMO! The words machine-gunned through the air, each syllable a bullet ricocheting off the white paper screen, exploding into shrapnel-sharp images of waves crashing against colonial narratives!

In the third row, a decrepit Marquis de Lafayette adjusted his powdered wig, his maggot-white flesh gleaming beneath layers of silk brocade. "Mon cher," he whispered to the student beside him, "this colonial gaze is tediously self-referential, n'est-ce pas?" His segmented body shifted uncomfortably against the metal chair.
Pinkas nodded, thin fingers working his fountain pen across silk-bound pages. The Turkish ibrik bubbled unnoticed on its portable flame beside his Converse high-tops. His 1950s suit hung from his rail-thin frame as he sketched the Marquis, capturing both the aristocratic bearing and the larval undulations.

A student near the door rose and slipped out. Her chair folded itself with a mechanical sigh.

Beneath the floor, a ballroom of maggots in 18th century attire danced a minuet across rotting floorboards, their segmented bodies swaying to music only they could hear, while overhead, Professor MacGregor's voice droned on about brushstrokes that captured maritime nostalgia.

"Consider Colville's precision against the backdrop of maritime mythology," MacGregor continued, switching slides. Twenty-seven students remained.
The projector beam sliced through particles of dust like a lighthouse cutting through maritime fog! Images of stark realism SMASHED against students' retinas with the force of waves against Nova Scotian cliffs!

Three maggots in Victorian mourning dress emerged from Pinkas's coffee cup, their segments rippling as they crawled onto his notebook. "La représentation du temps est toujours une illusion," Pinkas wrote beneath his sketch. "Voir Bachelard, 'L'Intuition de l'instant,' 1932."

"That's quite good," said the largest maggot, adjusting her bustled gown. She was the size of a house cat now, peering over his shoulder with eyespots that weren't eyes at all.

"Though Bachelard would argue that duration itself is the constructed fiction."
Four more students slipped away.

A porcelain teacup fell from nowhere, shattering against the marble floor of a palace that existed both within Pinkas's notebook and simultaneously in the space between slide transitions. The sound was unheard by everyone except those who had already left.

"Pop Art challenged representation while simultaneously embracing commercial imagery," Professor MacGregor declared, his beard catching light from the projector. Fifteen students remained.

POW! The Warhol slide erupted onto the screen, mass-produced imagery BLASTING through the studio like cultural shrapnel, embedding itself in the retinas of the dwindling audience!

A maggot in a 1960s mod dress and white go-go boots crawled across the floor, now human-sized, now gigantic. She adjusted her oversized sunglasses and addressed the remaining students. "The repetition compulsion in Warhol's work speaks to the inherent decay of meaning through reproduction," she lectured. "Just as we consume the dead, you consume these images."

Only the students who had already left could see her.

Pinkas sketched furiously, his pen making the sound of thousands of tiny mouths consuming. "La décomposition est la seule forme honnête de critique," he captioned beneath a drawing of the mod maggot lecturing to empty chairs. Then, smaller: "Voir Barthes, 'Mythologies,' mais aussi Derrida, 'Spectres de Marx.'"
Seven more students evaporated into the hallway, existing now as ghosts in the narrative structure, their absence more significant than their presence had been.
The temporality of the classroom fractured: Professor MacGregor was simultaneously lecturing about Hockney's Polaroid composites and also not yet born and also long dead and decomposed. The remaining students experienced this contradiction as mild boredom.

The Polaroids EXPLODED into fragmented perspectives, time itself SHATTERING into instantaneous moments that refused to be reassembled into coherent duration!

A maggot wearing a 1980s power suit with enormous shoulder pads crawled from Pinkas's ear. She had Andy Warhol's wig and carried a tiny Polaroid camera. "The segmentation of vision," she announced to no one and everyone, "mirrors the segmentation of our bodies and of time itself."

"Exactly," said Pinkas, the only remaining student now. "C'est pourquoi Hockney's joiners are essentially vermicular."

Professor MacGregor paused, noticing the exodus had left only the strange, thin boy with wild blonde curls. "You're still here, Mr..."

"Pinkas," said both Pinkas and the Victorian maggot-matron simultaneously.

In the space between slides, the maggots hosted an exhibition of their own. Life-sized creatures in historical costume staged tableaux vivants of famous artworks, their segmented bodies approximating human form through collective arrangement. The decomposition was the composition.

"I find your perspective on Hockney's fragmentation intriguing," Professor MacGregor said, approaching Pinkas's notebook. "May I?"

A shadow fell across the pages where the Marquis de Lafayette maggot was now writing a critique of colonial aesthetics using Pinkas's hand as a medium. "La perspective occidentale est une tyrannie," the fountain pen scratched.

"It's... in French," MacGregor observed.

"The language of critique is always foreign to the object being critiqued," Pinkas replied, while simultaneously the 1980s power-suit maggot whispered, "The medium is the message is the medium is the maggot."

CRACK! The very concept of separate realities SPLIT apart, the boundary between art lecture and vermicular society COLLAPSING under the weight of its own artificial distinction!
Professor MacGregor adjusted his glasses, seeing and not-seeing the maggots that now filled the studio, their historical costumes spanning centuries, their segmented bodies moving with the grace of dancers and the inevitability of decay.

"Your drawings," MacGregor said slowly, "remind me of an obscure text by Georges Bataille about formlessness as theoretical approach."

"Informe," nodded Pinkas, while the Victorian maggot-matron poured tea that was simultaneously coffee from the ibrik. "But I prefer to consider it through Kristeva's concept of abjection."

A grandfather clock that wasn't there before struck thirteen hours that didn't exist.

"Perhaps next week," said Professor MacGregor, gathering his slides, "we might discuss your work directly. I sense you're actually understanding what most students merely observe."

The maggots in 1700s court dress bowed elaborately. Those in 1920s flapper dresses performed a Charleston across the ceiling. The ones dressed as 1950s beatniks snapped their many segments in appreciation.

"Je serai là," said Pinkas, closing his notebook where the maggots now returned, shrinking back to illustrated size but no less real. "Nous serons tous là."

Professor MacGregor felt something crawl across his perception—not a thought exactly, but the space where a thought had decomposed. "Yes," he said, "I rather think you will." As they left the studio, the white paper backdrop became a movie screen playing all possible histories simultaneously. The maggots watched with compound eyes that weren't eyes at all, consuming the images as they consumed everything—with patient, inevitable hunger that transformed destruction into creation.

The overhead projector clicked off.

Somewhere, a new lecture was already beginning.

Tuesday

By Elwood Marlow

Within the slightly warped and wavering edges of a xeroxed image, a pale imitation of a person, a shadow christened Dale in the fleeting moments before the toner dust settled, stood pressed against a windowpane, his flat, two-dimensional gaze fixed upon the brick-lined streets and modest clapboard houses of Ellicott City, Maryland, a tableau vivant frozen in the amber of 1987, a year humming with the nascent anxieties of a pre-digital age, where the phrase "Within and without as a contemporary perspective ideology fully construed insofar as the anomaly peculiar to sheer speculation leads one to mediocrity, Tuesday," a seemingly abstract utterance pregnant with the weight of philosophical inquiry, echoed silently in the space between the copied paper and the tangible world Dale could only observe, a statement that, upon closer examination, unfurled like a meticulously crafted scroll revealing layers of meaning concerning the intricate dance between our internal landscapes and the external realities we navigate, the very nature of the belief systems that shape our understanding, and the inherent dangers of allowing unbridled conjecture to steer us toward the tepid shores of the ordinary, prompting one to first meticulously dissect its constituent parts before attempting to weave them into the tapestry of established intellectual frameworks spanning the realms of philosophy, where the "within" and "without" resonate with the age-old Cartesian duality, the ghost in the machine contemplating the physical world beyond its ethereal confines, and psychology, where the inner workings of the mind, our subjective experiences and cognitive biases, inevitably color our perception of the "without," the objective reality filtered through the lens of individual interpretation, and sociology, which examines how these internal ideologies are often forged in the crucible of social interaction, shaped by cultural norms and collective experiences that either broaden or narrow our understanding of the external world, and political science, where these systems of belief underpin governance and policy, the "within" of personal conviction either aligning or clashing with the "without" of the public sphere, the statement's initial dichotomy of "Within vs. Without" immediately establishing this fundamental separation between the subjective and the objective, the individual's private universe of thoughts and feelings

juxtaposed against the shared, tangible reality that exists independently of individual perception, a distinction that philosophers have grappled with for centuries, from Plato's allegory of the cave, where shadows are mistaken for reality, to Kant's transcendental idealism, which posits that our experience of the external world is structured by the inherent categories of our understanding, suggesting that what Dale, the photocopied shadow, perceived through the glass was already, to some extent, shaped by the inherent limitations of his two-dimensional existence, a pre-determined filter that abstracted the vibrant three-dimensionality of Ellicott City into a flattened plane of visual information, much like our own internal frameworks shape how we process the complexities of the world around us, leading us to the second crucial element, "Ideology," which, in its broadest sense, acts as that very filter, a comprehensive system of ideas and ideals that provides a framework for understanding and interpreting the world, a lens through which individuals and societies make sense of their experiences and formulate their beliefs, often forming the bedrock of economic and political systems, the very air that Dale, in his static representation, would have metaphorically breathed, the unseen structures of belief that governed the lives of the real inhabitants of Ellicott City in 1987, influencing their fashion choices, their musical tastes, their political affiliations, the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which they navigated their daily lives, unaware perhaps of the invisible architecture of their shared ideology, a framework built upon layers of cultural inheritance, social conditioning, and individual experiences, a framework that could either illuminate or obscure the underlying realities of their time, potentially leading to the third component, the "anomaly peculiar to sheer speculation," where an anomaly, a deviation from the expected or the norm, becomes the focal point of conjecture unanchored by empirical evidence or rigorous critical thinking, a tendency that the statement warns can ultimately lead to "mediocrity," a state of being average or ordinary, a failure to achieve excellence or produce truly insightful advancements, suggesting that if Dale, in his shadowy contemplation, were to fixate on some unusual architectural detail of an Ellicott City building, some quirk of 1980s fashion, and build an entire theory of existence upon that singular, perhaps insignificant, observation without grounding it in a broader understanding of the town's history, its social fabric, its economic realities, he would inevitably arrive at a shallow and ultimately unilluminating conclusion, a mediocre understanding born of isolated speculation, much like ideologies that arise from a fascination with outliers or unsubstantiated claims risk becoming brittle and

ultimately unhelpful in navigating the complexities of the real world, the mention of "Tuesday" injecting a note of the arbitrary, a sudden shift from the abstract to the mundane, a seemingly nonsensical anchor to the everyday rhythm of life in Ellicott City, a Tuesday in 1987 likely filled with the prosaic routines of work, school, and family, a deliberate juxtaposition that perhaps underscores the pervasive nature of these philosophical concerns, their quiet presence even within the ordinary fabric of our daily existence, suggesting that even as Dale, the photocopied shadow, observed the seemingly unremarkable Tuesday unfolding in Ellicott City, the interplay between internal perception and external reality, the influence of prevailing ideologies, and the potential pitfalls of unchecked speculation were silently at play in the lives of the town's inhabitants, shaping their understanding of their world in ways both profound and imperceptible, a reminder that even in the most ordinary of days, the fundamental questions of how we know what we know and how our beliefs shape our reality remain ever-present, a silent undercurrent beneath the surface of everyday life.

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